

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -

Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

Sunday, January 3, 2010

Strategic Framework Agreement Ag Working Group – Along with Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) Deputy Minister Al-Kaisey, AgCounselor Ron Verdonk co-chaired the sixth bilateral SFA meeting on December 30, 2009. Topics covered in this meeting included market access for seeds, beef and genetics, policy prescriptions for Iraqi agriculture, the requirement for matching funds when implementing initiatives with the MoA and the status of the TFBSO (DoD)/USDA program to provide M.S. degree training for up to 50 Iraqis starting in January 2010.

Rice Anyone? – Further to notice provided in the last MM, on 12/30 the Iraqi Grain Board finally formally announced that U.S. and Pakistani origin rice were chosen to supply quantities in response to the latest tender. ADM is the U.S. supplier in the amount of 70,000 MT, but some have questioned Pakistan's ability to meet the specifications for its share of the quantity awarded, 30,000 MT.

Ag Briefing the CG – AgCounselor Ron Verdonk briefed Commanding General Odierno on the outlook for the 2010 wheat and barley crops based on precipitation in the last quarter of 2009, clarifying notions of food self-sufficiency versus food security, constraints to local crop and livestock production and projects planned for Basra province to increase commodity imports and processing.

Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) AgAdvisors: Here by Popular Demand - OAA Baghdad has supplied a steady stream of information to Office of Provincial Affairs colleagues here at Embassy Baghdad concerning the projected size of the PRT AgAdvisor presence by the end of FY10 and for FY11. Using analysis developed by OCBD's Laura Geller, OAA has provided forecasts based on consultation with PRTs and in-house assessment that would have positions increase up to 31 (for some months in 2011) from the current number, 28. While State as committed to paying the cost of our AgAdvisors through FY10, it appears that DoD may be willing to foot the bill in FY11.

PRT In Focus – (Submitted last week by Mary Kerstetter, an AgAdvisor in Anbar Province) “I conducted dairy management training class for the women in Garmah. The class covered cheese making...it is the final part of the series that will allow the women to generate quality dairy products from their home and market them. One of the issues that they have is an unreliable way to get their milk to market. Too often the driver would not show up and the milk would spoil. This way they can process milk at home and have the added advantage of marketing it locally and getting a higher price for their product.”

Personnel Update – There are currently 35 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, embedded with U.S. military units, or here on TDY. FAS's Laura Geller wraps up her very helpful stint to OAA Baghdad January 6th.
